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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000833

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2015

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SUBJECT: CZECH VIEWS ON DEBATE OVER CHANGES TO EU'S CUBA POLICY

REF: A. PRAGUE 814

[1](#)B. BERLIN 1747

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly C. Krhounek for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action message, please see paragraph 8.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary. The Czechs expect the June review of EU Cuba policy to result in a number of tougher measures, although the package will remain less robust than it was before the current policy was adopted earlier this year. The expulsion of several European politicians from Cuba, combined with the lack of any improvement in the plight of imprisoned dissidents, has strengthened the hand of the Czechs in internal EU negotiations. Following Czech-Spanish meetings during the past two weeks at the FM and Political Director levels, the Czech MFA believes they are close to agreement on a package that other EU member states can support. The Czech MFA also believes that it would be "helpful" for the USG to propose including Cuba in the list of countries in the declaration on democracy that is being drafted for the June US-EU summit. End summary.

RELATIONS AT A NEW LOW

[1](#)3. (C) Czech MFA Cuba Desk Officer Petr Mikyska briefed us June 1 on the status of the review of EU policy towards Cuba. While the softer EU measures adopted earlier this year had a few initial benefits, such as the Cuban regime "unfreezing" relations with all EU member states, the honeymoon period was short-lived. According to Mikyska, when the UNCHR resolution on Cuba received EU support, Cuba once again began limiting contacts with certain "troublesome" embassies, including those of Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Netherlands. The lack of progress made in human rights, particularly the failure to obtain the release of jailed dissidents, is another disappointment. Mikyska also said that many EU member states were upset that when the Spanish Minister for Regional Development visited Cuba to sign an air traffic agreement, she did not meet with any Cuban dissidents. The Spanish tried to characterize this Ministerial level visit as a "technical visit," but it angered a number of other EU member states who felt they were not adhering to the EU policy and that the Spanish gave Cuba concessions that it had not earned.

[1](#)4. (C) For the Czechs, the standoff reached a new low on April 15, when the Cuban government refused to grant a visa to FM Svoboda to travel there on an official visit. Svoboda had planned to meet with both Cuban officials and dissidents, as authorized by the current EU policy. The Czechs believe this incident was a "turning point for the EU" as many member states were "shocked" by the visa denial and all have expressed support for the Czechs. The European Commission made a statement and even some of the best "friends of Cuba," like Commissioner Louis Michel, agreed that such actions were unacceptable. Last month's expulsions of German, Czech and Polish politicians prior to the May 20 opposition gathering garnered significant negative media coverage across Europe (reftels) and further undermined EU confidence in the GOC.

SIX MONTH REVIEW AND NEW POLICY

[1](#)5. (C) The Czech MFA believes that all of the above have strengthened the Czech position on Cuba within the EU and made the Spanish government more amenable to finding a mutual compromise. As the two countries represent the main ideological extremes on Cuba within the EU, the Spanish and Czechs met at the FM-level in late May in Madrid, and at the Political Director level in early June in Prague. The Czech goal is to change the January Council Conclusions and Mikyska believes that chances are quite good that the Czechs and Spanish will agree on a new draft policy. The new package under discussion has four prongs: First and most important for the Czechs, they expect agreement that individual member states will be able to decide for themselves whether to invite Cuban dissidents to national day receptions. For the Czechs, this would nullify the most distasteful aspect of the current policy. The new policy would also include

encouragement of cultural cooperation, something that would allow the Spanish to re-open their Cultural Center in Cuba, which is priority for them. The two countries are still arguing over the issue of high-level European visits -- the Czechs would like to ban such visits, but the Spanish support them. Mikyska believes that a final agreement will be reached only with the whole of the EU and that they will probably reach a compromise to allow "limited" high-level visits. Finally, the structured dialogue with dissidents will continue, with the support of most EU countries.

16. (C) Mikyska expects discussions to be concluded shortly, and expressed hope that "this time the Council Conclusions will be acceptable to everyone." Time is indeed short as the next COLAT meeting takes place June 6, followed shortly by the June 9 meeting of Permanent Representatives and the June 13 GAERC meeting of EU foreign ministers. That said, most of the Czech's discussions have taken place bilaterally, rather than in a larger EU context. Mikyska attributes this to the Luxembourg Presidency, which only sponsored one meeting where Cuban affairs were discussed, rather than continuous discussions at the working group level which had been the case during the Dutch presidency.

MAY 20 OPPOSITION MEETING

17. (C) Mikyska believes that the controversy over the May 20 meeting of the opposition was a debacle for the Cuban government, which had probably hoped to use it as an example of freedom and human rights in their country. There was tremendous pressure on the Cuban government to allow some kind of meeting to take place, but from the beginning they limited media access and prevented full dissident attendance. Mikyska is convinced that the GOC hoped that the meeting could be successfully used by Spain and other sympathetic EU member states to argue for making the current, more lenient policy, permanent. While it did succeed in presenting the Cuban opposition as divided, the international repercussions of the expulsions were significantly stronger than the GOC probably intended and gave the Czechs an excellent opportunity to strengthen their hand within the EU.

JUNE US-EU SUMMIT

18. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Mikyska concluded our discussion with an appeal for the USG to propose including mention of Cuba in the democracy declaration which is being prepared for the US-EU summit later this month. The Czech human rights department would like to see Myanmar, Belarus and Cuba all mentioned by name, but due to the ongoing sensitive nature of the Cuban policy evaluation at this time, they do not feel it is appropriate for them to raise it within the EU and risk overplaying their hand. As the USG is the host for the summit, they would like to see us propose text for discussion that would mention Cuba, so that the European Commission and Secretariat would have to consider it, and Mikyska promised

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that the GOCR support us.

19. (C) Comment: The Czechs believe that a series of Cuban government missteps have played into the Czechs' hands at the perfect time to use them during the six-month review process. It is equally clear to them that the Cuban government does not fully comprehend how one bilateral "problem" can influence the decisions of the entire EU bloc. They will continue to take advantage of this weakness and Mikyska declared that they are prepared to invoke the EU solidarity clause if necessary, to remind Castro that when he deals with the Czechs, it has repercussions for the entire relationship with the EU. End comment.

HILLAS